

# **West Lothian has experienced a post-Covid building boom**

**Over the last two years developers have built more new homes in the West Lothian than at any time since records began in 2006.**

More than 1,100 homes have been built each year since 2022. In the last year it was 1,115.

But despite this the council is still struggling to fund new social housing to attack the 10,000 plus waiting list,

The council plans for development of 900 new builds a year when planning school rolls and other infrastructure.

Councillors on the Education Executive heard an update on planning for projected school rolls, which are influenced by the levels of development. Extensions have been completed at Calderwood Primary and agreed for the West Calder High to meet growing school rolls coming from housing development.

Two new high schools have been completed in Winchburgh with the potential for extension, but the primary school age group currently appears to be falling.

The study revealed the building boom, alongside other population trends with falls in primary school rolls in some areas growth in others, and migration changes.

In a report to the Education Executive Housing Andrew Cotton the senior education planning officer said: "2022/23 was a

record year for housing completions in West Lothian with 1,211 new house completions being the largest number since records began in 2006.

“Completions were reduced with the Covid-19 construction lockdown in 2020/21 but once the lockdown restrictions were lifted housing completions quickly returned to and then exceeded their previous levels.”

He added: “One of the largest uncertainties is around the number of houses to be built in West Lothian. Forecast scenarios are presented for 900 house completions and full Local Development Plan scenarios. Any changes to the location and volume of new housing growth can significantly affect the forecasts.”

The average house completion rate over the last 5 years was 958. In 2022/23 and 2023/24 the completion numbers exceeded this. The forecast is based on an assessment of which residential sites are most likely to come forward in the short to medium term. This takes into account sites where planning permission has been granted, legal agreements associated with consented sites and education constraints.

The 900 house scenario is one which is most closely related to recent average annual house building rates. This level corresponds well to the Minimum All Tenure Housing Land Requirement (MATHLR) set out in the new planning regulations, NPF4, for West Lothian on 9,850 new houses over 10 years.

The forecast shows a picture of primary school rolls falling back slightly from the current rolls in the 900 forecast and a modest increase (to 15,500 pupils) in the LDP forecast.

The secondary rolls increase faster in both of the forecasts. The additional capacity created at Winchburgh Academy and Sinclair Academy has recently been created in West Lothian but further investment in secondary capacity is required to deal with these forecast secondary roll increases in some areas.

West Calder High School is set to be extended to 1,320 capacity by 2025. Winchburgh Academy and Sinclair Academy have both been designed with further extensions in mind and further demand can be managed through the West Livingston and Calderwood Core Development Area secondary capacity solution.

Mr Cotton said: "On some sites there has been some emerging evidence that the children may be taking slightly longer to appear than in the past as housing developments in West Lothian are attracting more families with either younger children or those who are looking to start a family.

"On other sites however, there is evidence that the expected children are appearing faster than previously with a particular focus on preschool and P1 age children in new build housing. "

NHS data is most reliable at the time when it is given to West Lothian Council. Those who register with another UK GP practice will be removed from the NHS data but children moving abroad may take longer to be removed from NHS records.

The report also outlined that migration patterns can change rapidly. "There is some evidence that a number of children from Eastern Europe have left West Lothian and this affected the roll at a number of schools. Continuing uncertainties around future migration policies form one of the most difficult assumptions to forecast."

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter